sequence complementary to a second portion of the sequence of said nucleic acid. The nucleic acid, the substrate and the aggregate probe are contacted under conditions effective to allow hybridization of said nucleic acid with the oligonucleotides on the aggregate probe and with the oligonucleotides on the substrate, and a detectable change is observed.

In a further embodiment, the method comprises providing a substrate having oligonucleotides attached thereto. An aggregate probe comprising at least two types of nanoparticles having oligonucleotides attached thereto is provided. The nanoparticles of the aggregate probe are bound to each other as a result of the hybridization of some of the oligonucleotides attached to them. At least one of the types of nanoparticles of the aggregate probe have oligonucleotides attached thereto which have a sequence complementary to a first portion of the sequence of a nucleic acid to be detected. A type of nanoparticles having at least two types of oligonucleotides attached thereto is provided The first type of oligonucleotides has a sequence complementary to a second portion of the sequence of said nucleic acid, and the second type of oligonucleotides has a sequence complementary to at least a portion of the sequence of the oligonucleotides attached to the substrate. The nucleic acid, the aggregate probe, the nanoparticles and the substrate are contacted under conditions effective to allow hybridization of said nucleic acid with the oligonucleotides on the aggregate probe and on the nanoparticles and hybridization of the oligonucleotides on the nanoparticles with the oligonucleotides on the substrate, and a detectable change is observed.

In another embodiment, the method comprises contacting a nucleic acid to be detected with a substrate having oligonucleotides attached thereto. The oligonucleotides have a sequence complementary to a first portion of the sequence of said nucleic acid. The contacting takes place under conditions effective to allow hybridization of the oligonucleotides on the substrate with said nucleic acid. The nucleic acid bound to the substrate is contacted with liposomes having oligonucleotides attached thereto, the oligonucleotides having a sequence complementary to a portion of the sequence of said nucleic acid. The contacting takes place under conditions effective to allow hybridization of the oligonucleotides on the liposomes with said nucleic acid. An aggregate probe

comprising at least two types of nanoparticles having oligonucleotides attached thereto is provided. The nanoparticles of the aggregate probe are bound to each other as a result of the hybridization of some of the oligonucleotides attached to them, at least one of the types of nanoparticles of the aggregate probe having oligonucleotides attached thereto which have a hydrophobic group attached to the end not attached to the nanoparticles. The liposomes bound to the substrate are contacted with the aggregate probe under conditions effective to allow attachment of the oligonucleotides on the aggregate probe to the liposomes as a result of hydrophobic interactions, and a detectable change is observed.

In yet another embodiment, the method comprises providing a substrate having oligonucleotides attached thereto. The oligonucleotides having a sequence complementary to a first portion of the sequence of a nucleic acid to be detected. A core probe comprising at least two types of nanoparticles is provided. Each type of nanoparticles has oligonucleotides attached thereto which are complementary to the oligonucleotides on at least one of the other types of nanoparticles. The nanoparticles of the aggregate probe are bound to each other as a result of the hybridization of the oligonucleotides attached to them. Next, a type of nanoparticles having two types of oligonucleotides attached thereto is provided. The first type of oligonucleotides has a sequence complementary to a second portion of the sequence of said nucleic acid, and the second type of oligonucleotides has a sequence complementary to a portion of the sequence of the oligonucleotides attached to at least one of the types of nanoparticles of the core probe. The nucleic acid, the nanoparticles, the substrate and the core probe are contacted under conditions effective to allow hybridization of said nucleic acid with the oligonucleotides on the nanoparticles and with the oligonucleotides on the substrate and to allow hybridization of the oligonucleotides on the nanoparticles with the oligonucleotides on the core probe, and a detectable change is observed.

Another embodiment of the method comprises providing a substrate having oligonucleotides attached thereto, the oligonucleotides having a sequence complementary to a first portion of the sequence of a nucleic acid to be detected. A core probe comprising at

least two types of nanoparticles is provided. Each type of nanoparticles has oligonucleotides attached thereto which are complementary to the oligonucleotides on at least one other type of nanoparticles. The nanoparticles of the aggregate probe are bound to each other as a result of the hybridization of the oligonucleotides attached to them. A type of linking oligonucleotides comprising a sequence complementary to a second portion of the sequence of said nucleic acid and a sequence complementary to a portion of the sequence of the oligonucleotides attached to at least one of the types of nanoparticles of the core probe is provided. The nucleic acid, the linking oligonucleotides, the substrate and the core probe are contacted under conditions effective to allow hybridization of said nucleic acid with the linking oligonucleotides and with the oligonucleotides on the substrate and to allow hybridization of the oligonucleotides on the linking oligonucleotides with the oligonucleotides on the core probe, and a detectable change is observed.

In yet another embodiment, the method comprises providing nanoparticles having oligonucleotides attached thereto and providing one or more types of binding oligonucleotides. Each of the binding oligonucleotides has two portions. The sequence of one portion is complementary to the sequence of one of the portions of the nucleic acid, and the sequence of the other portion is complementary to the sequence of the oligonucleotides on the nanoparticles. The nanoparticle-oligonucleotide conjugates and the binding oligonucleotides are contacted under conditions effective to allow hybridization of the oligonucleotides on the nanoparticles with the binding oligonucleotides. The nucleic acid and the binding oligonucleotides are contacted under conditions effective to allow hybridization of the binding oligonucleotides with the nucleic acid. Then, a detectable change is observed. The nanoparticle-oligonucleotide conjugates may be contacted with the binding oligonucleotides prior to being contacted with the nucleic acid, or all three may be contacted simultaneously.

In another embodiment, the method comprises contacting a nucleic acid with at least two types of particles having oligonucleotides attached thereto. The oligonucleotides on the first type of particles have a sequence complementary to a first portion of the sequence of the